

# Sample Business Proposal: BLT Farm

## **Business Owner: Lucy Little**

**Background** *(Specifically around agricultural experience. This should be accompanied by an attached resume. Touch on why you want to start your own business and if you have any experience owning your own business.)*

I grew up in New Jersey, and have lived and farmed in the Hudson Valley for the past two seasons. After graduating from college in 2009, I moved to Portland, Oregon, where I managed an urban garden and taught community members of all ages about growing organic produce. After one year in that position, I moved to Santa Cruz, California to participate in the Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture at UC Santa Cruz. I completed the 6-month apprenticeship program and earned a Certificate in Ecological Horticulture. Following my year in Santa Cruz, I moved to the Hudson Valley to work as a crew member and apprentice at Kinderhook Farm; a 1000 acre, diverse farm, which raises grass fed livestock including: beef cattle, pigs, chickens, and sheep. I was part of a crew of 6 people managing the farm. I spent one season there and became very well versed in caring for and raising these types of livestock. I particularly loved working with the pigs. They were not only one of the more profitable types of livestock that we raised, but were also good-natured and incredibly enjoyable to work with. This current season I am helping friends start their own for-profit farm in New Hamburg. We have been growing baby greens and tomatoes (in both high tunnels and in outdoor fields) for wholesale and farmers markets. Through this experience I have gotten to go along for the ride of starting one's own for-profit farming business, have learned a lot about all of the different steps involved, and have continued to grow my passion for starting my own business and farm. My experience this past year has also given me additional skills in growing tomatoes and greens, and a familiarity with these cash crops. I now have 4 seasons of farming under my belt and am excited to start my own agricultural business.

## **Business: BLT Farm**

### **Why**

I love working with pigs. I love growing and eating tomatoes. I am good at growing salad greens, and they are potentially a very profitable crop. I feel that a three year rotation of fields pigs to tomatoes to greens, then pigs again—could make a piece of land profitable and continue to increase the soil health, fertility, and productivity of the land. I also like the idea of a “theme farm:” a farm built on the idea of BLTs! This could eventually lead to the creation of an associated enterprise like a food cart or restaurant, and, in this case, maybe even eventually the production of grain and ultimately locally grown and produced bread.

**PIGS:** My experience working with a variety of types of livestock has led me to conclude that they have an immense potential to be profitable. I like the daily (and yearly) routine of working with livestock, and feel that I have the skills to raise a highly desirable product in pork. I feel that I can, between selling at farmers markets, and to restaurants, event organizers, and butchers, support myself as a farmer raising pigs. I also feel that pigs can continue to grow the fertility of the soils I farm. There is significant demand for local, sustainably raised pork in the Hudson Valley and New York City.

**TOMATOES:** I love the process of planting, trellising, pruning, and harvesting tomatoes. Fresh, vine ripened, heirloom tomatoes are in high demand, and are a product that can

really only be grown and distributed well locally. Tomatoes have a very high potential for profitability per acre. Even the most skeptical vegetable customers often go for a good tomato, and are happy to pay a premium price for it.

**SALAD GREENS:** Another very popular vegetable item that can act as a cash crop for a farm. This crop spends little time in the ground (so, if done strategically, the only labor necessary is seeding, flame weeding, irrigating, harvesting, and post-harvest handling).

These three products, rotated on a piece of land, can continue to grow and improve healthy soils, will draw customers to a stand at any farmers market, and will sell well to local restaurants and wholesale. There is the opportunity for year round income with pork and preserved tomatoes (should I eventually create added value tomato products from extras without a summer market). Salad greens could become a year round product and source of income should I eventually be able to build a high tunnel, allowing for winter growth of salad greens.

### **How**

**PIGS:** I plan to raise my pigs free-range, on pasture, rotationally grazed. Their diet will be supplemented with free-choice grain, and hopefully eventually dairy byproducts (whey, etc) and vegetable scraps from restaurants. I will not be certified organic, because that would preclude me from sourcing dairy byproducts and vegetable scraps. I do plan to be both Certified Naturally Grown and Animal Welfare Approved—both certifications that will help with my marketing, and guidelines that I plan to follow anyway. I will feed my pigs organic grain—either certified organic or certified “transition” if I can find a source for that. “Transition” grain is grown according to organic regulations on land that is less than three years out of conventional agriculture. After three years of production according to organic standards, this product will shift from “transition” to “certified organic.” “Transition” grains are slightly cheaper than certified organic grain, but still have no GMOs, or synthetic fertilizers or pesticides used in the growing of them. I hope to find a source for transition grain and purchase it collectively with other area farmers—in order to have it delivered to my site.

My first year I plan to purchase 22 1.5-month old feeder pigs, and 8 pigs for breeding stock: 2 males, 6 females in March. They will immediately go to pasture. I expect these pigs to be ready for slaughter at 6 months from birth. I plan to have 22 pigs slaughtered in August, and will sell the meat throughout late summer/autumn/winter. From then I will continue to raise feeder pigs birthed from my own breeding stock, while also continuing to grow my breeding stock. Please see attached budget for the timeline of growth. I will breed my first gilts when they reach 8 months old and go into heat (in September)—isolating them with my two boars. This means I should have my first batches of piglets 4 months after conception—in January of the following year. Each sow has the potential to birth two litters a year, with an average expectation of 10 piglets per litter. If my sows birth more piglets than I plan to raise myself, I will sell the additional piglets as feeder pigs to other local farmers.

I plan to raise ???? breed because ?????. I also plan emphasize that my meat is heritage pork in my marketing.

**TOMATOES:** I plan to begin with ½ acre of tomatoes each year, switching to a full acre of tomatoes the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of BLT Farm. Based on my research, I expect to produce 11,200 pounds of tomatoes per year per ½ acre of land over the course of a 7 week

tomato harvest season. My first three seasons I will grow my own tomato starts in the greenhouse on the incubator property. When I move to my own land, I will build a greenhouse in which I will continue to grow my own starts. My first year, I will mulch my tomatoes with straw mulch. My second year, I will purchase enough woven ground cover to cover my ½ acre for tomatoes in it before planting the tomatoes—preventing any weeds from growing in my tomatoes. I will use this weeding strategy every year afterwards. The woven ground cover should last at least 3 seasons' use. I will use organic growing methods, but, again, will not be certified organic. I will amend the soils of my tomato fields accordingly depending on soil tests and recommendations.

GREENS: I will use a walk behind BCS tractor to prep greens beds the week of seeding. I aim to seed new greens beds every week starting sometime in late April in order to have continuous harvest of greens from June through October. I will use a Johnny's pinpoint seeder to do the seeding, and will harvest with the help of Johnny's quick cut greens harvester (which I have used in the past and find to be a huge labor saver). I will harvest greens the day of delivery or market, wash them using the incubator's shared wash station, and dry them in either a hand crank salad spinner I would purchase, or, more ideally, in an old washing machine I could ideally locate for free on craigslist and set up on site. I have used this method in the past also and found it to work well. I assume that I will be functioning without cooler space, so plan to wash greens and either deliver them immediately, or sell them at market immediately. Eventually, on my own land, I will install a cooler (run by a coolbot) in the barn I plan to build—to help with greens storage. If there is access to shared/rented cooler space on the incubator site, I may choose to use a small amount of that space for my greens.

ROTATION: Once on my own permanent piece of land, I hope to rotate fields: one year pigs, the next tomatoes, the next salad greens, and back to pigs. I aim to have at least two years of rest for each field between times of growing tomatoes. The pigs will continue to add fertility to fields through the addition of their manure.

### **Labor**

My first year of operation, I plan to be the only labor for the farm. The first, second, and maybe third years, I will need to outsource labor to deliver the pigs to the slaughterhouse. I plan to contract with Glynwood to do this for me. My second year I plan to hire someone to help with harvest 2 days a week for 6 hours a day from June through mid September. I plan to pay them \$10 an hour, and recruit someone who lives locally who is looking for part time farm work. At no point will I be able to provide any of my employees with on farm housing as part of their compensation. I plan to advertise my open positions on local farming listserves, on a number of websites (including Good Food Jobs, ATTRA, NOFA NY, and craigslist), and may put up flyers in town. My third year I plan to hire someone full time (40 hours a week) to help with farm tasks (including harvesting) from the beginning of June through mid September. I plan to pay this person \$10 an hour, and again recruit someone locally looking for seasonal work. This third year I also plan to hire someone to work two farmers markets a week—at a total of 16 hours a week at \$10 an hour for the 20 weeks of markets between June and the end of October. My fourth year and fifth year I plan to hire two full time employees: one April 1<sup>st</sup> through October 31<sup>st</sup>, 40 hours a week at \$12/hour...this person will do all farmers markets, along with some field work. The other June 1<sup>st</sup> through mid September at \$10 an hour for 40 hours a week—doing only field and farm work.

### **Off-farm Work/Housing**

I do plan to have off farm work during my first year of running “BLT Farm.” I have not yet secured that employment, but plan to make at least \$15,000 a year in off farm work that year to help bring in funds to start and build my business. (I would like to work as a waitress in the evenings at a local restaurant that might eventually also purchase my products. This has the potential for good money, reasonable hours, and important connections with potential customers being made.) I hope to be able to farm full time in year two (see attached document: Budget). I may find very part time winter work, possibly working for Hudson Valley Seed Library or Winter Sun Farms—to continue to help with cash flow in the winter months. But I do not know that this will be 100% necessary.

I plan to live on site at the incubator for my first three years of running “BLT Farm,” and then move to my own land acquired or leased in year four.

### **Marketing**

I plan to sell my products a few different ways. I plan to sell cuts of pork, loose salad greens, and tomatoes (both by the pound and wholesale seconds for preserving) at farmers markets. I plan to start by selling at one farmer’s market year one, and eventually expanding to selling at three different markets. I have yet to locate which markets these will be, but hope to find three good markets within reasonable traveling distance from both the incubator site and my permanent land site. I plan to sell at markets between the beginning of June and the end of October. Eventually I may shift to at least one year round market (selling high tunnel grown greens, added value tomato products, and cuts of pork) to help with winter cash flow for the farm. My first, year I will use my personal car (a small station wagon) to transport my goods to market. My second year, I plan to purchase a larger van for my business, with which I will transport my products to market. I plan to sell tomatoes and both cuts and whole pigs (eventually maybe roasters) to restaurants, event coordinators, and butchers. I hope to establish these markets and customers in the Hudson Valley, near both the Incubator Site and where my permanent land will be. Eventually, I may go into the business of selling feeder pigs also. This will depend on the market demand for both meat and feeder pigs. The tomatoes that I can’t move at farmers markets or to local restaurants, I plan to sell to wholesale outlets (Winter Sun Farms, Hudson Valley Harvest, local health food stores) and potentially process into added value products (tomato sauce) to be sold in the winter months. The specifics of different marketing outlets is outlined in my 5 year projected budget.

I plan to eventually make my own website using the free service Wordpress. I will create my own logo, and have the necessary labels printed locally at PDQ Print Services. I plan to do my own branding, and maybe eventually hire a consultant providing these services in year 5 or 6 of my business.

### **Land, Barn, Shared Equipment Needs (based on beginning January 2015)**

PIGS: Beginning March 2015, I will have 30 feeder pigs, and will need 2 acres to rotate them through. The winter of 2015 I will need barn space for 2 boars and 6 sows. I plan to have around 60 piglets born January/February of 2016. I will need space for these piglets in a barn. I will put all 68 pigs on pasture beginning March 2016, and will need 4 acres of pasture to rotate them through this year. The winter of 2016, I will need barn space for 2 boars, 6 sows, and beginning Jan/Feb 2017 around 120 piglets. I will put these pigs on pasture March of 2017, and will need a total of 8 acres to rotate my pigs

through. I will need space in barns to house my pigs for the winter of 2017/2018—I will have 2 boars, 9 sows, and eventually 189 piglets. I plan to move my pigs to my permanent piece of land the spring of 2018. I will immediately begin rotating them through pasture land. I will construct a structure for them on this land during the 2018 season for the 2018/2019 winter. I plan to stabilize my herd at 200 pigs (2 boars, 9 sows, and 189 feeder pigs a season) and will need at least 12 acres of pasture on this land to rotate my herd through. My first three years I will need to contract Glynwood to transport my pigs to slaughter, and possibly to pick up the carcasses and cuts. After year three, I plan to purchase my own truck and trailer in order to be able to transport them myself.

VEGETABLES: Beginning April 2015, I will need a total of an acre of tillable land—half of which will grow tomatoes, the other half of which will grow salad greens. I will need to contract Glynwood to do the initial tilling of this acreage. I will purchase a BCS walk behind tractor during the 2015 season, and will need barn space to store this small piece of equipment. The 2016 season I will need another 1 acre for the same purpose—ideally an acre that has not grown solanums in the past 3 years. The 2017 season I will need 2 acres of vegetable acreage—1 acre for tomatoes, 1 acre for greens. On my permanent site, I would ideally have all 12 acres be suitable for vegetable production, but need at a minimum for 6 of the acres to be suitable for vegetable production.

#### **5-Year Projected Budget**

See attached document.